

# The Peculiar Life of the Lonely Postman by Denis Thériault – review

There is a charming playfulness to Thériault's prose in this well-executed story of love found through letters and deception



**WB Gooderham**

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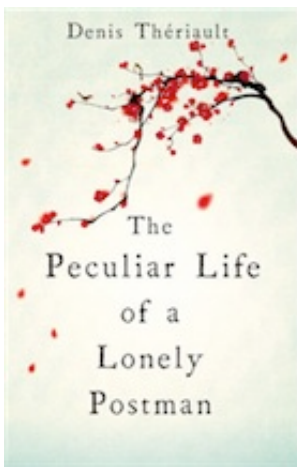
Poetic skills flourish in Thériault's novella. Photograph: David Sillitoe for the Guardian

Shy, unassuming Bilodo is a Montreal postman with a secret. Forsaking physical relationships, he chooses to live vicariously through the personal letters he intercepts and carefully steams open in the privacy of his flat. One correspondence interests him especially: an epistolary flirtation, conducted via haikus, between Grandpré, a local academic, and Ségolène, a young Guadeloupian teacher.

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**The Peculiar Life of  
a Lonely Postman**  
by Denis Thériault

Bilodo finds himself falling in love with the sensitive Ségolène, and when, in a Nabokovian twist, Grandpré is run over while attempting to post his latest haiku and dies at Bilodo's feet, the postman decides to step into the deceased's life to ensure the long-distance relationship continues. As Bilodo's poetic skills



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begin to flourish, so does the affair, the haikus gradually becoming more accomplished and revealing as Bilodo's grip on his own identity becomes increasingly tenuous. Translated by Liedewy Hawke, there is a fable-like simplicity to Thériault's prose and a playfulness in the narrative voice to temper any moral queasiness that may be inherent in the subject matter. Quirky and charming with a well-executed denouement, this novella brings to mind nothing less than a giddily-lovesick Kafka.

• To order *The Peculiar Life of the Lonely Postman* for £7.99, go to [bookshop.theguardian.com](http://bookshop.theguardian.com) or call 0330 333 6846.



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